



# DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

## news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

For Release April 23, 1986

Sam Marler (303) 236-7904

David Klinger (202) 343-5634

**PHASED GRAZING REDUCTIONS THROUGH 1990**  
**SET FOR FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE'S**  
**C.M. RUSSELL NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE**

Livestock grazing on Montana's Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge will be reduced by about a third by the end of 1990, the Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced today.

The phased reduction will begin in 1987 and follow in incremental steps in order to minimize the effect on grazing permittees. At the same time, habitat management plans will be developed to guide the management of each grazing allotment, assuring that forage is used in an equitable manner to meet the needs of both wildlife and livestock.

The reductions follow nearly a decade of review of the grazing program on C.M. Russell, and are necessitated by recent court decisions on the requirements of the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act.

Today's actions were announced in a "record of decision" signed by William P. Horn, Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Fish and Wildlife and Parks. That document is based on a 1985 environmental impact statement on grazing at C.M. Russell that, among other alternatives, proposed an allocation of approximately 63 percent of the refuge's available forage for wildlife, 37 percent for livestock.

In selecting that option as the Fish and Wildlife Service's goal for management of grazing on the refuge, Horn reiterated the legal mandates and associated court rulings that direct his agency to give priority to wildlife in its operation of the refuge. "The alternative I have chosen meets those requirements, and also recognizes that appropriate livestock use can continue on C.M. Russell, but at a level that more appropriately conforms to the primary wildlife goals enumerated in the Executive Order that created the refuge," Horn said.

(over)

C.M. Russell Refuge has been managed solely by the Fish and Wildlife Service since 1976, when Congress transferred joint responsibility from the Bureau of Land Management, another Interior Department agency. Lawsuits concerning grazing on the refuge led to a 1983 U.S. Court of Appeals decision establishing that wildlife has priority for forage up to certain limits specified in the original Executive Order, and that beyond those levels, wildlife and livestock have equal priority. It also reiterated that the refuge must be managed under the guidelines of the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966.

Currently there are 65 grazing allotments on C.M. Russell, divided among 88 permittees, five of whom reside on private inholdings within the refuge. Refuge boundaries contain nearly 1.1 million acres of federal, State, and private land in north-central Montana. Pronghorn antelope, mule and white-tailed deer, Rocky Mountain elk, sharp-tailed and sage grouse, coyotes, and black-tailed prairie dogs are found on the refuge, as are endangered species such as bald eagles and peregrine falcons.

Habitat management plans will be devised in consultation with the individual permittees, the Bureau of Land Management, the Montana State Board of Land Commissioners, and other agencies. As these plans are put into effect, adjustments in grazing levels may be made as long as they are appropriate to meet overall wildlife objectives. Horn said this flexibility will ensure that a balance is maintained between the needs of wildlife and the ranchers and other members of the public who use the land.

Habitat management plans could recommend a variety of grazing management procedures or techniques, construction of new facilities, and other habitat management practices, such as prescribed burning. Once these plans are completed and the grazing reductions achieved, the Fish and Wildlife Service will provide ranchers the option of three-to-five-year grazing permits for their allotments.

Use of public land by livestock is expressed in terms of grazing "animal unit months," or the amount of forage required by a 1,000-pound animal for one month. Today's announcement of an overall 33 percent reduction in total grazing animal unit months recognizes that changes vary from allotment to allotment. However, the rate at which changes are phased in will be equal on each allotment.

"The grazing reductions and habitat management plans will ensure that the refuge grazing program complies with the laws by which we must manage C.M. Russell and our objectives for wildlife habitat improvement," Horn said. "At the same time, we feel we have designed a schedule that is orderly and takes into account the needs of the ranchers who must make the necessary adjustments in their operations."